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(54) **PRINTING SYSTEM CAPABLE OF PRINTING IN ANY ONE OF PLURAL IMAGE FORMING APPARATUSES OVER NETWORK, IMAGE FORMING APPARATUS, AND PRINTING METHOD**

(58) **Field of Classification Search**

None

See application file for complete search history.

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(57) **ABSTRACT**

In general, a printing system of an exemplary embodiment includes a client terminal connected via a network, and a plurality of image forming apparatuses each including an operating unit which receives an operation input of a user. A first image forming apparatus that receives a print file from the client terminal transmits metadata of the print file to a second image forming apparatus. The second image forming apparatus displays a list of print files which are on standby for printing based on the metadata, and obtains a print file from the first image forming apparatus when a print instruction and a selection of a desired print file from the list of print files are received through the operating unit, and performs printing based the print file.

7 Claims, 6 Drawing Sheets

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CPC **G06F 3/1227** (2013.01); **G06F 3/126**
(2013.01); **G06F 3/1268** (2013.01); **G06F**
3/1288 (2013.01); **H04N 1/00209** (2013.01);
H04N 1/00244 (2013.01); **H04N 2201/0094**
(2013.01)

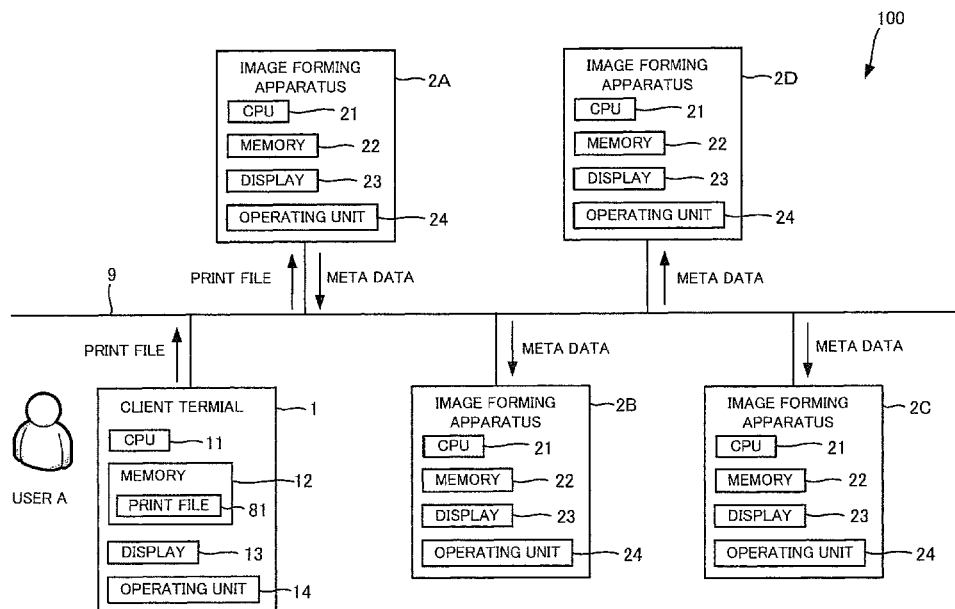


FIG. 1

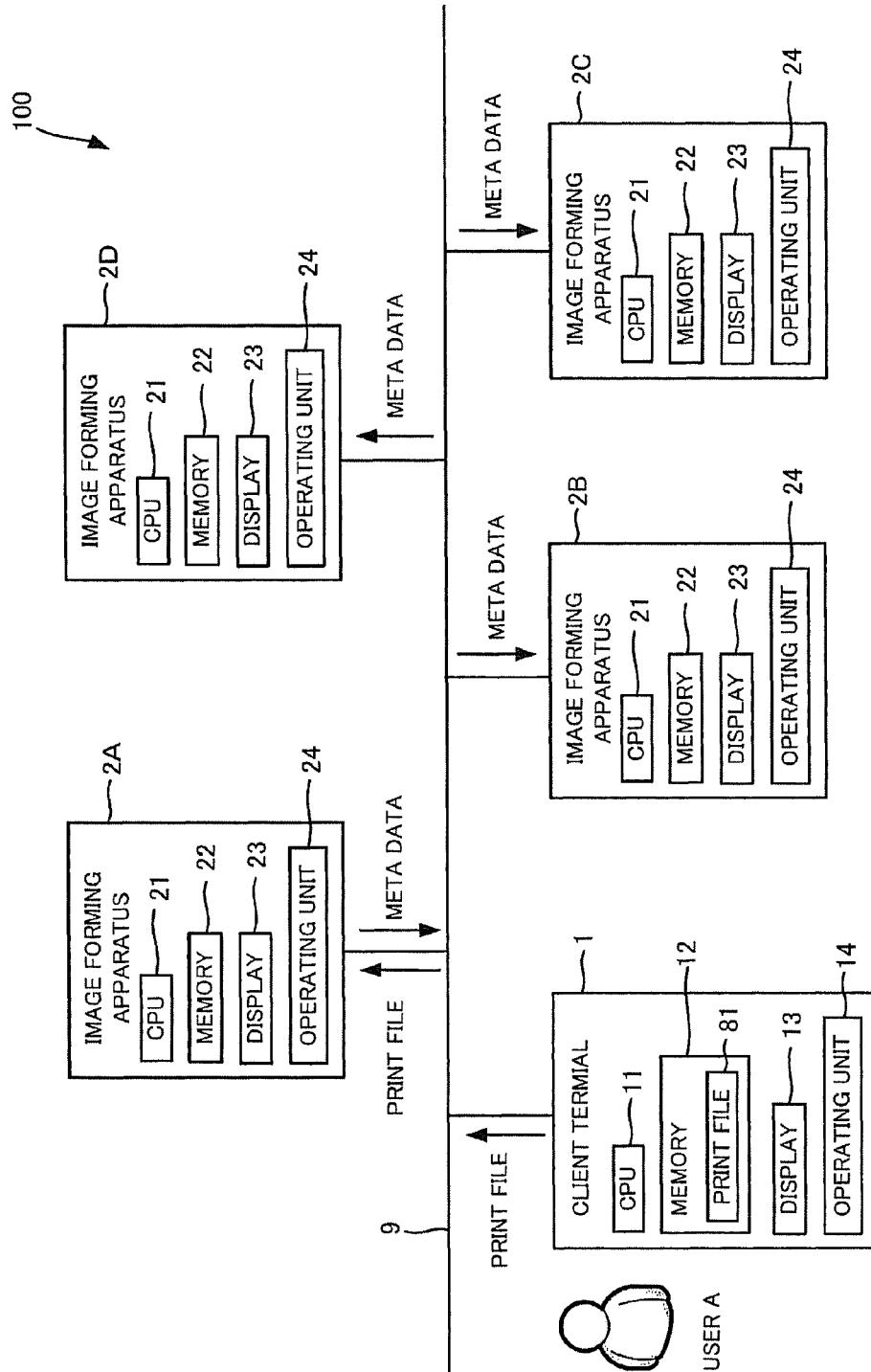


FIG. 2

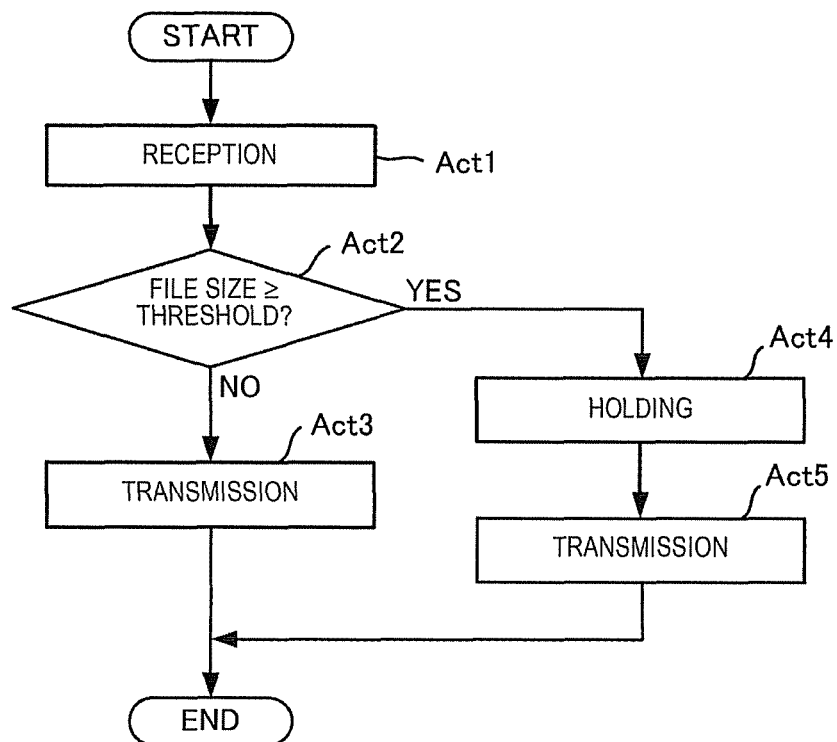


FIG. 3

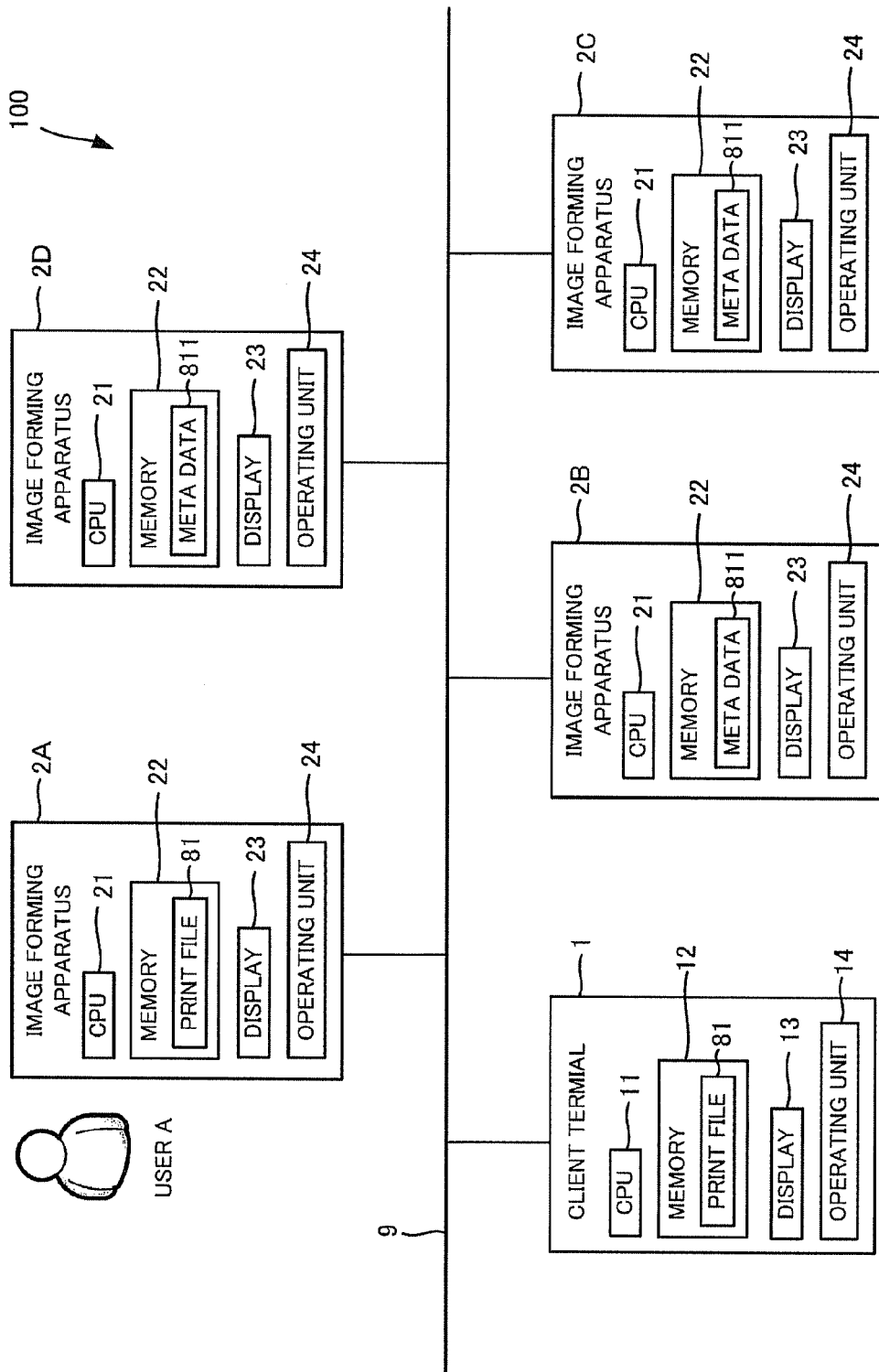


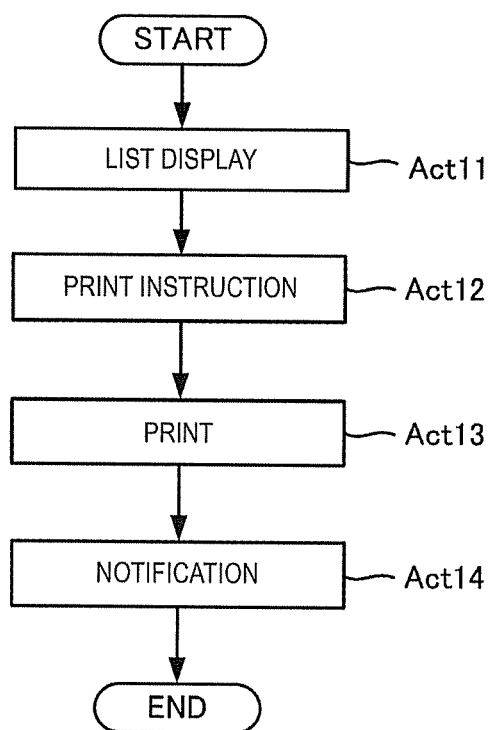
FIG. 4

FIG. 5

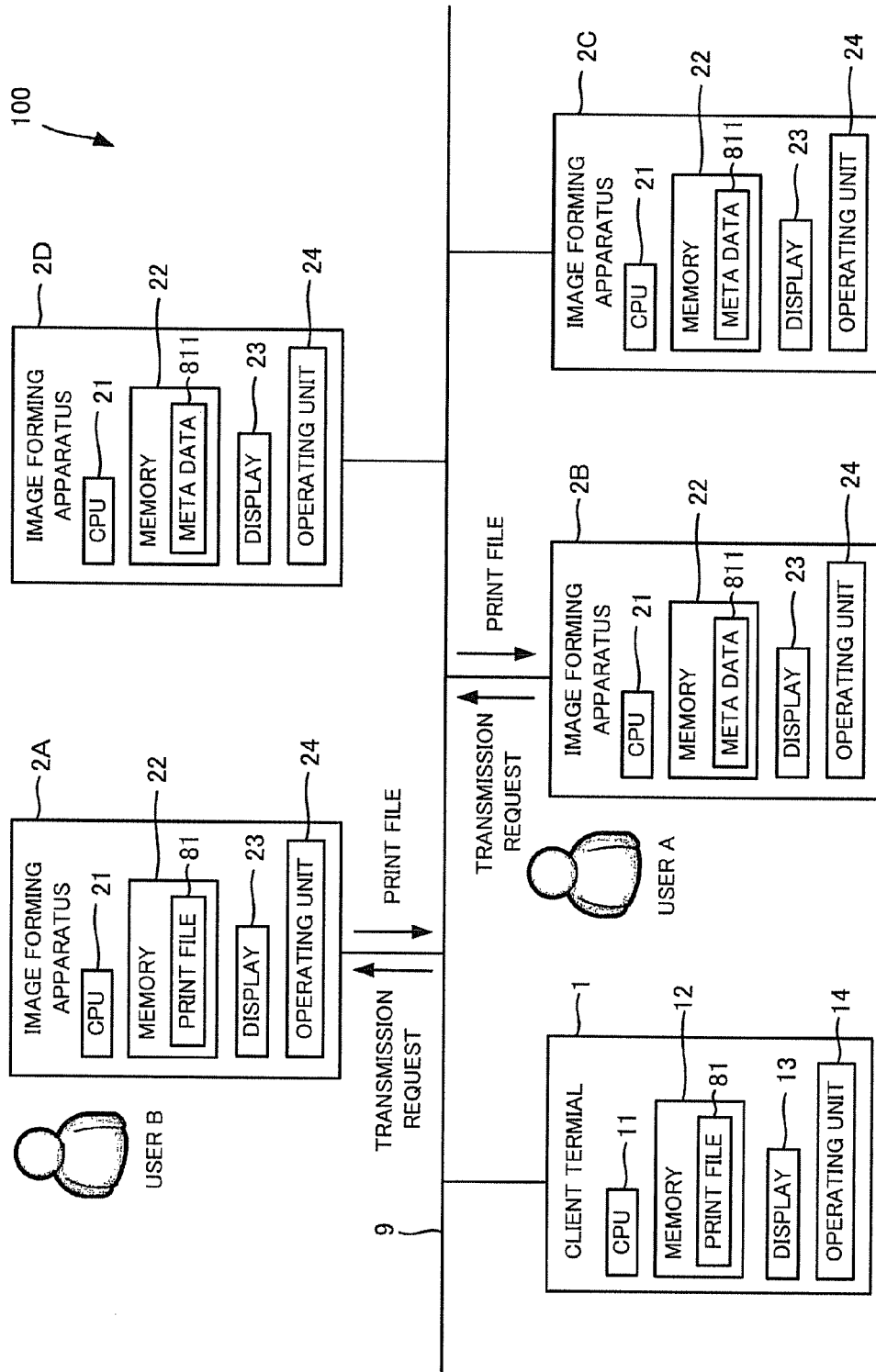
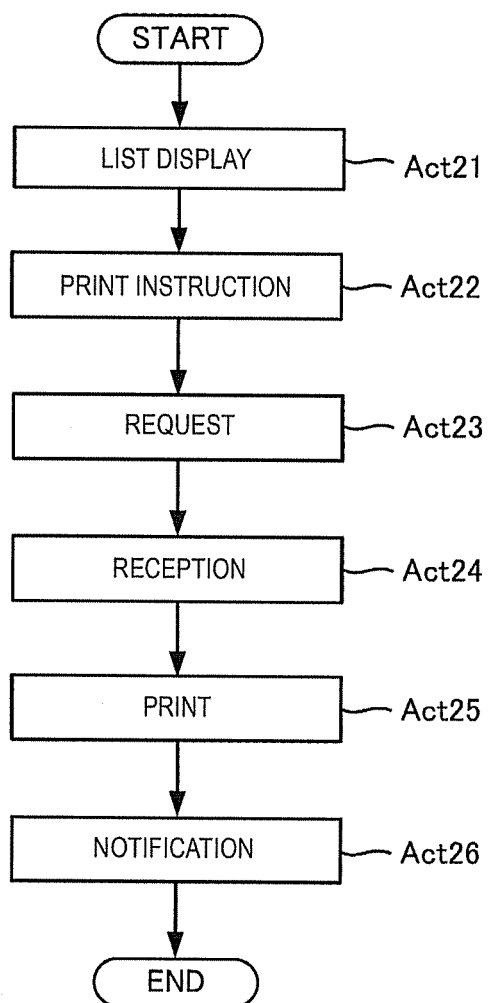


FIG. 6

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PRINTING SYSTEM CAPABLE OF PRINTING IN ANY ONE OF PLURAL IMAGE FORMING APPARATUSES OVER NETWORK, IMAGE FORMING APPARATUS, AND PRINTING METHOD

FIELD

Embodiments described herein relate generally to a printing system capable of printing a print file in any image forming apparatus without using a dedicated server for sharing the print file.

BACKGROUND

There is a printing system capable of printing a print file in any image forming apparatus without using a dedicated server for sharing the print file. In this type of printing system, when the print file is printed in the related art, a client terminal of a user first transmits the print file to all image forming apparatuses over a network. Subsequently, the user goes to any image forming apparatus, selects a print file desired to be printed, and prints the print file in the image forming apparatus.

However, in the printing system of the related art, since the image forming apparatus holds a plurality of print files, a load is applied to the image forming apparatus. In the printing system of the related art, since the client terminal transmits the print file to all of the image forming apparatuses over the network, a load may be applied to the network.

DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. 1 is a block diagram of a printing system.

FIG. 2 is a flowchart for describing a registration process performed by the printing system.

FIG. 3 is a block diagram for describing a printing process performed by the printing system when printing is performed in an image forming apparatus that holds a print file.

FIG. 4 is a flowchart for describing a printing process performed by the printing system when the printing is performed in the image forming apparatus that holds the print file.

FIG. 5 is a flowchart for describing a printing process performed by the printing system when a print file having only metadata is printed in the image forming apparatus.

FIG. 6 is a block diagram for describing the printing process performed by the printing system when the print file having only the metadata is printed in the image forming apparatus.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

In general, a printing system of an exemplary embodiment includes a client terminal connected to the printing system via a network, and a plurality of image forming apparatuses each including an operating unit which receives an operation input of a user. A first image forming apparatus that receives a print file from the client terminal transmits metadata of the print file to a second image forming apparatus. The second image forming apparatus displays a list of print files which are on standby for printing based on the metadata, and obtains a print file from the first image forming apparatus when a print instruction and a selection of

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a desired print file from the list of print files are received through the operating unit, and performs printing based on the print file.

In general, an image forming apparatus of an exemplary embodiment includes an operating unit which receives an operation input of a user, and is connected to a client terminal and another image forming apparatus via a network. When a print file is received from the client terminal, the image forming apparatus transmits metadata of the print file to the other image forming apparatus, and displays a list of print files which are on standby for printing based on the metadata. When a print instruction and a selection of a desired print file are received through the operating unit, the image forming apparatus obtains a print file corresponding to the metadata from the other image forming apparatus which is the transmission source of the metadata, and performs printing based on the print file.

In general, a method of printing a print file of an exemplary embodiment includes transmitting metadata of a print file to another image forming apparatus when the print file is received from a client terminal connected to the image forming apparatus via a network, displaying a list of print files on standby for printing based on the metadata, obtaining a print file corresponding to the metadata from the other image forming apparatus which is the transmission source of the metadata when a print instruction and a selection of a desired print file are received through an operating unit, and performing printing based on the print file.

Hereinafter, an exemplary embodiment will be described with reference to the drawings.

FIG. 1 is a block diagram of a printing system **100**.

The printing system **100** includes a client terminal **1**, and a plurality of image forming apparatuses **2A** to **2D**. The client terminal **1** and the plurality of image forming apparatuses **2A** to **2D** are connected so as to communicate with each other via a network **9**.

The client terminal **1** is, for example, a personal computer (PC). The client terminal **1** includes a central processing unit (CPU) **11**, a memory **12**, a display **13**, and an operating unit **14**. The operating unit **14** is a keyboard, a mouse, or a touch panel, and receives an operation input of a user.

The image forming apparatuses **2A** to **2D** are, for example, multi-function peripherals (MFPs) having multiple functions such as the capability to print or FAX. Each of the image forming apparatuses **2A** to **2D** includes a CPU **21**, a memory **22**, a display **23**, and an operating unit **24**. The operating unit **24** is a keyboard, a mouse, or a touch panel, and receives an operation input of the user.

The image forming apparatuses **2A** to **2D** that are co-operated as one group are set to each of the image forming apparatuses **2A** to **2D**. For example, internet protocol addresses or host names of the image forming apparatuses **2B** to **2D** that are co-operated are set to the image forming apparatus **2A**. Similarly, the image forming apparatuses **2A**, **2C**, and **2D** that are co-operated are set to the image forming apparatus **2B**. As stated above, the image forming apparatuses **2A** to **2D** which are the group are previously set to each of the image forming apparatuses **2A** to **2D** that are co-operated.

The client terminal **1** and the image forming apparatuses **2A** to **2D** execute various processes to be described below by reading programs within the memories **12** and **22** using the CPUs **11** and **21**.

Firstly, the printing system **100** performs a registration process of registering a print file **81** desired to be printed by a user **A** in the image forming apparatuses **2A** to **2D**.

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Hereinafter, the registration process performed by the printing system **100** will be described.

The client terminal **1** installs a print driver of the image forming apparatus **2A**. When receiving a print operation input by the user A, the client terminal **1** sends the print file **81** to the image forming apparatus **2A** through the print driver.

The print file **81** includes image data and metadata **811**. The metadata **811** is data for specifying the image data or setting a printing method. The metadata **811** includes the number of copies, the number of pages, a file name, and identification information of the print file **81**, and constitutes a job list which is a list of print files. The print file **81** is obtained by converting a file desired to be printed by the user into a page description language (PDL) file with the print driver. The print file **81** may be obtained by converting a file desired to be printed by the user into an extensible markup language (XML) file, an XML paper specification (XPS) file, or a portable document format (PDF) file with the print driver or an application.

Hereinafter, the process performed by the image forming apparatus **2A** will be described as the registration process with reference to the flowcharts of FIGS. **1** and **2**.

The image forming apparatus **2A** receives the print file **81** from the client terminal **1**, and stores the print file **81** in a printing standby status in the memory **22** (Act **1**).

The image forming apparatus **2A** determines whether or not the size of the print file **81** is equal to or greater than a preset threshold (Act **2**).

When the size of the print file **81** is less than the threshold (Act **2**: NO), the image forming apparatus **2A** transmits the print file **81** to the other image forming apparatuses **2B** to **2D** (Act **3**).

When the size of the print file **81** is equal to or greater than the threshold (Act **2**: YES), the image forming apparatus **2A** holds the print file **81** (Act **4**).

The image forming apparatus **2A** transmits the metadata **811** of the print file **81** to the other image forming apparatuses **2B** to **2D** (Act **5**). The metadata **811** includes identification information of the image forming apparatus **2A** which is the transmission source of the metadata **811**. The other image forming apparatuses **2B** to **2D** add the print file **81** on standby for printing to job lists, respectively. As mentioned above, the client terminal **1** and the image forming apparatuses **2A** to **2D** synchronize the job lists with each other.

A printing process performed by the printing system **100** after the above-mentioned registration process will be described below. In the following description, it is assumed that the size of the print file **81** desired to be printed by the user is equal to or greater than the threshold. It is assumed that the print file **81** is held in the image forming apparatus **2A**. It is assumed that only the metadata **811** of the print file **81** is transmitted to the other image forming apparatuses **2B** to **2D**.

Firstly, a printing process performed by the printing system **100** when the user A performs printing in the image forming apparatus **2A** that holds the print file **81** will be described with reference to FIGS. **3** and **4**. The flowchart of FIG. **4** shows a flow of the process performed by the image forming apparatus **2A**.

The user A goes to the image forming apparatus **2A**, and operates the operating unit **24** to allow the image forming apparatus **2A** to display the job list (Act **11**).

In this example, the user A selects the print file **81** from the job list, and instructs the printing of the print file **81** (Act **12**). The image forming apparatus **2A** prints the print file **81**

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(Act **13**). The image forming apparatus **2A** notifies the client terminal **1** and the other image forming apparatuses **2B** to **2D** that the print file **81** is printed. The image forming apparatus **2A** changes the status of the printed print file **81** to a print completion status from a print standby status, and removes the print file **81** (Act **14**). The client terminal **1** and the other image forming apparatuses **2B** to **2D** change the status of the printed print file **81** to the print completion status, and synchronize the job lists with the job list of the image forming apparatus **2A**.

Next, a printing process performed by the printing system **100** when the user A prints the print file **81** in the image forming apparatus **2B** will be described with reference to FIGS. **5** and **6**. In this example, although the user A plans the printing in the image forming apparatus **2A**, and sends the print file **81** to the image forming apparatus **2A**, it is considered that another user B uses the image forming apparatus **2A**. The flowchart of FIG. **6** shows a flow of the process performed by the image forming apparatus **2B**.

The user A goes to the image forming apparatus **2B**, and operates the operating unit **24** to allow the image forming apparatus **2B** to display the job list showing that the status of the print file **81** is on standby for printing (Act **21**). The user A selects the print file **81** having only the metadata **811** in the image forming apparatus **2B**, and instructs the printing of the print file **81** (Act **22**).

The image forming apparatus **2B** transmits a transmission request of the print file **81** to the image forming apparatus **2A** which is the transmission source of the metadata **811** (Act **23**).

The image forming apparatus **2B** receives the print file **81** from the image forming apparatus **2A** (Act **24**). In this case, the image forming apparatus **2A** removes the print file **81**.

The image forming apparatus **2B** prints the print file **81** (Act **25**).

The image forming apparatus **2B** notifies the client terminal **1** and the other image forming apparatuses **2A**, **2C** and **2D** that the print file **81** is printed. The image forming apparatus **2B** changes the status of the printed print file **81** to the print completion status, and removes the print file **81** (Act **26**). The client terminal **1** and the other image forming apparatuses **2A**, **2C** and **2D** change the status of the printed print file **81** to the print completion status, and synchronize the job lists with the job list of the image forming apparatus **2B**.

In the present exemplary embodiment, although it is stated that the user A transmits the print file **81** to the image forming apparatus **2A**, it is possible to perform the same operation even when the print file **81** is transmitted to any one of the other image forming apparatuses **2B** to **2D** constituting the group.

The user may log on to the printing system **100** in the client terminal **1** and the image forming apparatuses **2A** to **2D**, and may operate the respective apparatuses **1** and **2A** to **2D**. The respective apparatuses **1** and **2A** to **2D** may create the job lists for the respective users, and may synchronize the job lists of the respective users.

As described above, according to the exemplary embodiment described in the present specification, it is possible to provide a printing system capable of printing a print file in any one of image forming apparatuses without using a dedicated server for sharing the print file.

What is claimed is:

1. A printing system comprising:
 - a client terminal that is connected to the printing system via a network; and

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a plurality of image forming apparatuses each including an operating unit which receives an operation input of a user,

wherein a first image forming apparatus that receives a print file from the client terminal transmits metadata of the print file to a second image forming apparatus, and the second image forming apparatus displays a list of print files which are on standby for printing based on the metadata, obtains the print file from the first image forming apparatus when a print instruction and a selection of a desired print file are received through the operating unit, and performs printing based on the print file,

wherein the first image forming apparatus transmits the print file to the second image forming apparatus when a print file having a size less than a threshold is received.

2. The system according to claim 1,

wherein the first image forming apparatus holds the print file until the first image forming apparatus or the second image forming apparatus perform the printing based on the print file when a print file having a size equal to or greater than the threshold is received.

3. The system according to claim 1,

wherein the print file includes image data and metadata, and the metadata is data for specifying the image data and data for setting a method of printing the image data.

4. An image forming apparatus that includes an operating unit that receives an operation input of a user, and is connected to a client terminal and another image forming apparatus via a network,

wherein when a print file is received from the client terminal, the image forming apparatus transmits metadata of the print file to the other image forming apparatus, and

the image forming apparatus displays a list of print files which are on standby for printing based on the metadata, obtains a print file corresponding to the metadata

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from the other image forming apparatus which is a transmission source of the metadata when a print instruction and a selection of a desired print file are received, and performs printing based on the print file, wherein when a print file having a size less than a threshold is received, the image forming apparatus transmits the print file to the other image forming apparatus.

5. The apparatus according to claim 4,

wherein when a print file having a size equal to or greater than a threshold is received, the image forming apparatus holds the print file until the image forming apparatus or the other image forming apparatus performs the printing based on the print file.

6. A method of printing a print file, the method comprising:

transmitting metadata of a print file to another image forming apparatus when the print file is received from a client terminal connected to the image forming apparatus via a network;

displaying a list of print files which are on standby for printing based on the metadata;

obtaining a print file corresponding to the metadata from the other image forming apparatus which is the transmission source of the metadata when a print instruction and a selection of a desired print file are received through an operating unit; and

performing printing based on the print file,

wherein when a print file having a size less than a threshold is received, the print file is transmitted to the other image forming apparatus.

7. The method according to claim 6,

wherein when a print file having a size equal to or greater than the threshold is received, the print file is held until the image forming apparatus or the other image forming apparatus performs the printing based on the print file.

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